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The Abolition of the Slave Trade

THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND
SLAVERY IN ENGLAND

BY

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FOR THE

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THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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THE ABOLITION OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND SLAVERY IN ENGLAND.

To an ordinary citizen of England, living in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth or Eighteenth century, the institution of slavery did not seem necessarily evil. As there were very few papers in those days and fewer magazines, the mass of the people could learn of common occurrences only through hearsay. The people engaged in the slave trade prosecuted it to their best advantage. It seemed very proper to them, because in that manner they gained their living.

When the trade started, it was perfectly lawful. In 1503 the first ship load of slaves landed in Santo Domingo, brought over by Fr. Francisco de Bobadilla, who had been sent to the New World, by the Spaniards, to be governor there.⁽¹⁾

The governments of Spain took great care that these slaves should be well treated and passed laws for their comfort.

At the beginning of Charles V reign he considered the slave trade a good means for fostering commerce between nations. In 1542, however, he heard of the evils resulting from the contact of negro and Indian slaves, and that the negroes, in consorting with their brother Indian slaves, had not only reverted to their former savage state, but had brought the Indians with them, thus making a whole, degenerate race. This state of things

1. Read, A Short History of Slavery in America.
Fortnightly Review Sept. 1919.

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was so evil on the face of it that Charles V published an edict prohibiting all slavery in his American colonies.⁽¹⁾

About this time was started the weak beginnings of propaganda against the slave trade. Pope Leo X wrote—"I consider that not only the Christian religion but Nature herself cries out against the state of Slavery."

During the reign of Elizabeth, Sir Thomas Hawkins asked for a charter to enable him to have exclusive rights in the carrying of slaves. The Queen delayed before granting it, but finally did so at the earnest request of the merchants. Having this charter, Sir Thomas and his friends took great care to keep the trade as inconspicuous as possible. They, and their successors plied the trade merrily for almost two centuries more before England began to wake up to its enormities. Indeed, it frequently takes a long time for an Englishman to make up his mind, but, when it is finally made upon any question, that question is never allowed to die until it is satisfactorily ended for him.

Between 1670 and 1680 indications of the spread of a sentiment hostile to the institution began to show themselves. Morgan Godwin wrote a treatise against slavery and the Bishop of Canterbury wrote The Negroes and Indians Advocate. Their writings were not read as much nor circulated as widely as they would be at present, but news was filtering through and people were beginning to wonder.

In 1696 Southern published his powerful tragedy of

1. Clarkson, T., History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade: 1, 33-41.

slave life, Oronooko, which, during its proformances profoundly affected the audiences. A few years later Dr. Primatt brought out a dissertation on the Duty of Mercy in which he says, "For whether a man be white or black, he is so by God's" appointment and, abstractly considered, is neither a subject for pride nor an object for contempt."⁽¹⁾

Pope, in his Essay on Man, speaks for the slave. Thomson, also, in his Seasons brings out the cruelty of such a traffic. Wallis in his System of the Laws of Scotland says, "Neither men nor governments have a right to sell those of their own species. Men and their liberty are neither purchaseable nor salable."

In 1750 Reverend Griffeth Hughes, a rector of St. Lucy in Barbadoes, and a man with the courage of his convictions, published a Natural History of the Island, in which he laid bare the awful condition of the enslaved negroes. About this time Malachi Postlewaite in his Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce asked, "Whether this commerce in humanity is not an incessant cause of war among the Africans?"⁽²⁾

In the earlier part of the Eighteenth century, the question of whether a slave was a slave wherever he was taken became rather important. Many retired sea captains were in the habit of taking a few slaves into retirement with them. These

1. Clarkson, History of Abolition of African Slave Trade: I. 59.

2. Clarkson, History of Abolition of African Slave Trade: I. 61.

slaves were anxious to escape. The neighboring Englishmen were anxious to help them, trouble ensued, and the merchants and retired men brought the question before the famous lawyers, York and Talbot. After a space of time for due deliberation, it was decided that a slave was a slave wherever he went.⁽¹⁾ The merchants and planters took care to advertise this decision throughout the country. They expected that the people were satisfied and that no further trouble would ensue. They became careless in their treatment of their servants and quickly had public opinion against them. One case in particular is of interest and deserves to be noted more fully.

In 1765 a slave, Jonathan Strong by name, was cruelly treated by his master. He was so overworked, in fact, that he became useless. His master, then threw him into the street. While in this hopeless condition, Mr. Granville Sharp took notice of him and gave him money and care until he was strong enough to look after himself. A few days after his recovery his master met him on the street, recognized him, and under the law claimed him and took him home. Mr. Sharp became so incensed at this outcome he determined to spend his entire time for the purpose of getting the decision of York and Talbot annulled. In 1769 he published a book entitled, A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery in England. In this work he had refuted every argument brought forward by York and Talbot and pleaded for a retrial of the subject. This book went

1. Clarkson, History of Abolition of Slave trade:I, 65.

through two editions and stirred up so much sentiment against the first decision that, after three or four further cases of cruelty to slaves, a group of the most eminent lawyers was hired to reconsider the subject. These men decided in the famous Somerset case of 1772 that a slave, setting foot on English soil, immediately became free.

The Somerset decision caused so much joy throughout the country that Mr. Sharp felt justified in writing to Lord North advising him to have the whole institution, slavery and the trade, abolished immediately. The letter was, however, ahead of its time, and caused a lot of amusement among the Lords.⁽¹⁾

From this time on until 1787, the feeling against the slave trade grew. Several men stand out conspicuously for the cause of Abolition. Dr. Adam Smith in his Theory of Moral Sentiments deplored the institution of slavery, and even tried to prove that slaves were equal, if not more advanced than their masters.

Dr. Robertson, a resident of the West India colonies, in his History of America showed himself a warm advocate of abolition. He laid bare many unpleasant truths regarding the trade which, hitherto, had been kept hidden.

The Abbe' Raynal wrote an account of the laws, government, and social institutions of Africa, in the last pages of which he deplores the existence of a trade as was then being carried on. "But these negroes, it is further urged, were born slaves. Barbarians! Will you persuade me that a man can be the property of

1. Clarkson: History of Abolition of Slave Trade, I, 68.

a sovereign, a son the property of a father, a wife the property of a husband, a domestic the property of its master, a negro the property of a planter?"⁽¹⁾

About this time Dr. Gregory wrote his Essays Historical and Moral, in which he took an opportunity to deplore the progress of the slave trade, giving as his reasons against it, the fact that commerce was not a purely economic institution, and that people should allow an ethical element to enter into it. If they ever did allow such feelings, they would not ever be able to carry on slavery.

Another large class of agitators against the slave trade consisted of Quakers. Among these men we find George and William Allen especially prominent.

William Allen was primarily a scientist. He was born in 1770. His father was a silk merchant who had joined the Society of Friends in middle life. Hence William Allen became quite a strong advocate of their views. While he was yet very young, he became very much interested in Chemistry, left his father's business, and set up a small laboratory for himself in Plough Court near London. He got a fellowship in the Linean Society and gave many lectures before his associates and the schools. He soon became even more interested in philanthropic work. From his boyhood up, he had been intensely interested in the movement for abolishing the slave trade. He became acquainted with Thomas Clarkson in 1785 and with Wilberforce a few years later, and remained intimate with both men throughout the rest of his life. Not only was he

1. Clarkson, History of Abolition of Slave Trade: I, 91.

interested in slavery, but also in the promotion of a higher education; in the betterment of the poor; and in the adjustment of Parliament to meet the conditions of a growing population.

George Fox was also a prominent member of the Society of Friends and quite active in their various undertakings. He was interested, just as Allen was, in abolishing the slave trade for humanitarian reasons. These two men nearly always attended the meetings of the Quakers, and usually took a prominent part in the debates and discussions that came up in these sessions.

The Quakers were the first people who organized for the purpose of abolishing the slave trade. In 1787, they provided a committee to circulate reading matter upon the subject with a view to create a wider popular interest in abolition.

Across the ocean there was another group consisting mostly of Quakers who were also disturbed by the presence of slavery. In 1676, these American Quakers in their yearly meeting considered a motion deploring such a trade. At every meeting thereafter they discussed the question and appointed committees to stir up public opinion against it until 1787. Other men, who expressed themselves against the trade, and afterwards joined with the Friends, were John Pemberton and Dr. Rush. William Burling and Judge Sewell, both Friends, worked hard for the cause and in 1774, by uniting their church with other religious institutions, great strength was gained.

It is a strange coincidence that all these men and sects were working independently until 1787, and still, when at that date unity was needed to carry the work further, they were all ready to unite. William Dillwyn, a man born in America but

who moved to England in 1774 corresponded with John Pemberton, thus bringing England and America together. John Pemberton knew all the interested men in America and Dillwyn knew them in England.

About 1785 Dr. Peckard, a professor at Cambridge, gave as the subject for the prize essay, the Slave Trade. Thomas Clarkson, then a student at Cambridge, decided to try for it. He did, and won the prize. While preparing the paper he became so interested in the subject that he decided to write a whole book about it. As a result of his success in the contest, he met James Phillips, George Sharp and William Dillwyn. These men became interested in him and his work, and later on were a great help to him.

Before very long Mr. Wilberforce was brought into the movement. William Wilberforce was born in 1759. As a child he went to Hull Grammar school. While there he nearly became a Methodist and was just saved by his mother who took him away and sent him to Pocklington. It did not take him long to forget his Methodism and become immensely popular. In 1776, he was sent to St. John's College, Cambridge. He never studied very hard, but he had a way of learning enough to pass his examinations. He became famous for his hospitality and good fellowship. In 1780 he was elected to Parliament for Hull. On arriving in London, he was generally welcomed and became at once a member of five clubs. (1)

As soon as Mr. Wilberforce was definitely known to be an advocate of abolition, Thomas Clarkson communicated with him and notified him of a joint meeting of all the friends of abolition in London. It was at this meeting that Mr. Wilberforce was prevailed upon to carry the fight against slavery into the House of Commons.

1. Dictionary, National Biography: XXI, 209.

By this time, however, the general feeling had become so strong that, to the man who had charge of the cause in Parliament came a great deal of honor. Wilberforce cannot be looked upon as a great hero, because, what he did would certainly have been done with as much pleasure by any other big politician of that time. Nevertheless, Wilberforce should have his just measure of praise, for any man who endeavors to have a question taken up for the first time, discussed, moved upon, and passed in the House of Commons, certainly deserves a great deal of recognition, if not for martyrdom, at least patience.

In the meeting for the promotion of abolition, a standing committee for pushing the cause in Parliament was formed. The very next day, this committee began its work and Thomas Clarkson was sent out to Bristol, Liverpool, and Lancaster for further information.

During his journey he learned the manner of getting, transporting and treating the slaves. He discovered as much as possible about the natural productions of Africa with the purpose of making a collection of these raw materials for the information of interested persons. Another primary object was to gather together as many witnesses against the trade as would be willing to testify. Then he wished to know the amount of civilization really enjoyed by the Africans, which in fact, he learned through the imports and exports to and from that country.

While in Bristol he was shocked by discovering that a great many of the rumors which were being circulated regarding the cruel treatment of slaves were more than true. The instant that he obtained any reliable information, he would report the

same to Mr. Wilberforce. However, during his travels he experienced difficulties in getting reliable witnesses, for the merchants and planters resolved at all costs to keep their very lucrative trade, and did not scruple to bribe their sailors. He finally did succeed in becoming acquainted with a Mr. Falconbridge, a man who for four years had been a surgeon on board African slavers. This man had voluntarily left the trade, and although his reports might be slightly prejudiced, he could be trusted farther than most of the others.

Before the year 1787, the country had quietly countenanced this trade, not especially liking it, but at the same time not finding it particularly odious. But, during the years 1787 and 1788 the whole country had sprung into flame. The religious sects forgot their feuds and joined hands. We even find Bishops addressing large audiences of Quakers on the question of the Slave trade. From this time on, Parliament held the reins and would make or break the Cause.⁽¹⁾

II.

At the beginning of the session of Parliament in the Spring of 1788, Mr. Wilberforce became very ill and it was thought he might not live. Consequently, it fell to Mr. Pitt to strike the starting blow.

On May 5, 1788, he rose in the House of Commons and

1. Clarkson, History of Abolition of Slave Trade: I, 323

gave warning of the fact that Mr. Wilberforce in the event of his recovery and he, in the event of his friends non-recovery, would bring in a motion regarding the slave trade.⁽¹⁾ On May 9, Mr. Wilberforce being still indisposed, Mr. Pitt moved that the house would, in the near future, take up the subject of the slave trade. This time several men expressed themselves. Mr. Fox announced that the sooner an evil practice was done away with, the better it would be. Mr. Burke, while stating that he was of a fair mind, wished to put in a word for delay until the African merchants had had a chance to clear themselves. However, he said that he was one of those 'who wished for the abolition of the slave trade.'

Sir James Johnston brought forward the fact that the agitators had not been idle, for already the negroes in Grenada were crying, "Mr. Wilberforce for negro! Mr. Fox for negro! The Parliament for negro! Almighty God for negro!" He held that immediate steps were imperative. The motion did not progress, however, and the matter was left until the next session.

This only served to spur on the friends of the cause, and on May 21 Sir W. Dolben brought in a bill for the regulation of the trade. He said that he had no intentions of abolishing the trade, but he did feel that it should be regulated. He merely wanted to make carrying conditions more humane by regulating the number of negroes carried in proportion to the size of the vessels which transported them. At the time, however, the merchants and planters were powerfully represented and the motion came to naught.

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXVII, 396.

Twenty days after that, Lord Penrhyn brought in a petition from the merchants and traders of Liverpool— "stating the long existence of the slave trade, the essential benefits the country had derived from it, the encouragement that the legislature held out to individuals to embark their fortunes in it, and the injury that they must necessarily suffer from any sudden measure being taken against it." The House delayed until the 30th instant. (1)

On the second of June the House resolved itself into a committee to consider the proposition of Sir W. Dolben who, during the previous session, had amended his bill. After extended debate, the question was left until June 17. Upon that day Mr. Gascoyne rose to give his opinion that such a filling up of the blanks would prove the abolition of the trade. Mr. Pitt thought—"that if it did not prove such a thing, such a thing might well be proved." Mr. Beanfoy spoke strongly in favor of the regulations. It was then proposed to make the bill retrospective, and moved to have it dated the tenth of June. After some further debate, the bill was read a third time and passed by a majority of forty-eight votes.

The bill as it stood was designed to make the transportation of the negroes more comfortable. A one hundred and fifty ton vessel which was properly fitted for the transportation of slaves might carry from two to three men to a ton. A vessel of that size, not fitted up correctly should be allowed one man per ton. Vessels of larger tonnage should be allowed to carry fewer men in proportion to their size.

The subject came up in the House of Lords upon the twenty-fifth of June. The House resolved itself into a committee to consider the "Bill providing certain temporary regulations respecting the transportation of the Natives of Africa in British ships to the West Indies and elsewhere."⁽¹⁾ The time was not ripe. Public opinion had not reached the Lords and a storm of protest arose. Lord Bathurst argued vehemently against making the bill retrospective, contending that all ex post facto laws were unjust, that the present case was particularly so, and that no legislative compensation would be nearly adequate. Lord Rodney agreed with Lord Bathurst and said that, "it was absurd to suppose that the merchants whose only profits arose from the number of healthy slaves they delivered to the markets would not take every precaution possible for the comfortable transportation of said slaves." The Lord Chancellor was particularly incensed and declared that, "as the bill stood now, it was nonsense!" He, therefore, supposed that some amendments would be proposed to connect the nonsense of one part of the bill with the nonsense of the other!⁽²⁾

Earl Stanhope, who was personally acquainted with the Society of Abolition had a more unbiased view of the question. He agreed that the bill was not properly worded, and considered it the House's duty to amend it. As it stood now the proportion of Africans to the vessel tonnage varied inversely, and that, the Earl said, "was absurd and must have been a mistake." He contended,

1. Parliamentary Debates: XXVII, 638.

2. Parliamentary Debates: XXVII, 596.

however, that the condition of the slaves was actually deplorable, for they were packed on shelves between decks and so crowded that the air breathed by them was putrid. The Earl of Carlisle, a strong believer in the Cause, expressed his astonishment at the negative feeling of some of the honorable gentlemen. He would take great pleasure in voting for the bill.

With the speech of Carlisle, more men rose and began arguing in favor of the bill, and after further debate, it was amended to contain a clause providing for some compensation and sent to the House of Commons.

These men of the lower house decided that their rights had been infringed upon, and postponed consideration of the measure for three months. A new bill was then immediately brought in which passed both houses.

The day that the bill passed Parliament William Allen wrote, "It gives me great satisfaction to see so many of my countrymen warmly pushing the movement for the ultimate abolition of slavery."⁽¹⁾ In fact, he was so strongly opposed to such a trade that he decided to give up sugar which was cultivated by the negro. This he actually carried out, and no more sugar did he eat until the trade had been abolished.

One year after Mr. Pitt's motion in the Commons, Mr. Wilberforce, now fully recovered and ready to begin work in earnest, brought the subject before the House in a powerful speech. In this address made upon the 12th of May, he showed the House, which

1. Life of William Allen: I, 6.

had resolved itself into a committee for the consideration of the Slave Trade, just how necessary the abolition of such a trade would be for the cause of humanity. He said that a report having been previously presented by the Privy Council, the House should by now be fully acquainted with the facts. His speech, therefore, was designed to deal merely with the facts and no more. He contended that the trade was making Africa into a barbarous country.⁽¹⁾ "What a striking view of the wretched state of Africa does the tragedy of Calabar furnish! Two towns, formerly hostile, had settled their differences and by an intermarriage among their chiefs, had each pledged themselves to friendship, but the trade in slaves was prejudiced by such pacifications and it became the policy of our traders to renew the hostilities. Thus, their policy was soon put in practice, and the scenes of carnage which resulted was such that it is better to refer the gentlemen to the report of the Privy Council.... Does the King of Barbessin want brandy? He has only to send his troops in the night time to burn and desolate a village, the captives will serve well as commodities that may be bartered to the British traders."

In short, Mr. Wilberforce's speech consisted of ten main points. The first one stated that the number of slaves annually imported to the West Indies greatly exceeded the number of slaves retained. Second, that the greater number of negroes brought from Africa came from the interior and their manner of capture was unknown. Third, that the trade carried on by European Nations along

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXVIII, 42.

the coast of Africa, for the purchase of slaves has necessarily a tendency to occasion frequent and cruel wars among the natives. Fourth, that the continent of Africa at this time furnished several valuable articles of commerce which were highly necessary to this Kingdom. Fifth, that the slave trade had been found by experience to be peculiarly injurious and destructive to the British seamen employed in this work. Sixth, that the mode of transportation exposed the slaves to too great sufferings. Seventh, that a large proportion of slaves thus transported had perished in the harbors of the West Indies. Eighth, that the loss of newly imported negroes in the first three years of their importation bore a large proportion to the whole number imported. Ninth, that the natural impulse to increase the slave population had been impeded. Tenth, that the whole number of slaves in Jamaica in 1768 was one hundred and sixty-seven thousand, and in 1787, was two hundred and fifty-six thousand. Twenty-two thousand had been imported each year and the total number had not even doubled in the period of nearly twenty years.⁽¹⁾

At the close of the speech, which lasted until twelve-thirty, Lord Penrhyn rose and announced that, far from being convinced, he thought it was about time to consider the lateness of the hour and hence leave the discussion until the next day. Mr. Gascoyne, wishing for more time to collect materials for refutation, favored adjournment. Mr. Burke commended Mr. Wilberforce for his "masterly speech" and wished the House to come to a speedy and favorable decision upon this subject. Mr. William Young called the

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXVIII, 63

attention of the House to the fact that unless there were a great many restrictions made, the trade would still be carried on in a clandestine manner, and the resultant sufferings of the negroes would be ten times greater than otherwise. Mr. Fox then applauded Mr. Wilberforce for saying that, "Wherever an effectual remedy cannot be had, I approve of a palliative, because something like a remedy is better than no remedy at all. In this case an effectual remedy is not only more desirable, but is much less difficult to be obtained than a palliative."⁽¹⁾ Calderman Newnham said "that though he wished as well to the cause of humanity as any man, yet, as a representative of London, he could not give his support to a proposition, which if carried, would fill the city with men suffering as much as the poor Africans." Lord Penrhyn thought better of his just intentions of shutting off the debate quickly, and rose to assure the House that if they thought sugar could be cultivated as cheaply by free men they thought very wrong and should immediately be put right. Mr. William Smith expressed his hearty thanks to Mr. Wilberforce for the manner in which he handled such a delicate subject.

Thus the debate closed. On May 21, the House again resolved itself into a committee to discuss the trade. The enemies of the Cause had been working as hard as its friends. They had succeeded in gathering a large mass of documents. Mr. Henniber rose to read a letter from the King of the Dawhomarjians.

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXVIII,

The letter seemed designed to prove this king's personal prowess and his earnest wish to have the white King trade with him. He offered slaves to King George and gave promises of many more that could be gotten if need arose.

This letter nearly carried its point, and at first the House was quite sure that it proved that not all the Africans were against the trade. Mr. Courtenay held, however, that this one man was the exception that proved the rule, and only served to strengthen the need for some one to make a strong stand against the trade. (1)

Mr. Marsham wished to state that the evidence brought in by the Privy Council was not far from being *exparte* evidence—for not one mention was made of the side of the traders. He then accused Mr. Wilberforce's party of having friends in the Privy Council.

Mr. Molineux held that the abolition of the slave trade would destroy the West India trade. He asked the House not to forget those whom they had seduced to hassard their property in this trade. (2)

After some debating around a circle, Sir W. Dolben rose and asked permission to bring in a bill to continue and amend, "An Act to regulate, for a limited time the shipping and carrying of slaves in British vessels from the coast of Africa. The permission was granted.

While these discussions were going on in Parliament, the committee for the abolition of the slave trade was active in

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXVIII, 74.

2. Parliamentary History of England: 101.

printing pamphlets and holding meetings. The committee usually met in London with Mr. Wilberforce just before the question was to come up in the House.

At a meeting on April 14, Mr. Fox moved that "The slave trade is inhuman, unjust, impolitic, and ought to be abolished, and that the House would take speedy and effectual means for that purpose."⁽¹⁾ On April 23, the House found itself in the midst of a debate on the subject. Mr. Wilberforce was enthusiastically holding forth, when up rose Alderman Newnham to state that, as the House was certainly convinced of the folly of abolishing the trade, he could see no further use in listening to non-essentials. Mr. George Howard lamented that the question had ever been introduced. Mr. Fox supported Mr. Wilberforce. Finally, a motion was carried to finish the debate at the next session, but a date was not set.

On February 4, 1791 Mr. Wilberforce tried again and asked that a committee above stairs be appointed to consider the question and, after Mr. Gascoyne had had his say and Colonel Tarleton had upheld him, Mr. Wilberforce's motion was carried.

Matters were again discussed on April 18 of that same year. Mr. Wilberforce repeated the substance of his former long speech, putting great stress on the activeness of making laws merely to regulate such a trade.

Mr. James Martin asserted "that whoever had lived to an advanced age must be well aware to what considerable extent a mistaken self-interest could darken the understanding, and prevent the judgment of even the best meaning persons."

1. Life of William Allen: II, 60.

- The debate was progressing in favor of Mr. Wilberforce, when Mr. Pitt arose and stated that he wished to express himself fully and could not do so at such a late hour of the night. He, therefore, moved an adjournment.

The debate was resumed on April 19 and this time Mr. William Young made a noble attempt to prove the feasibility of the trade chiefly on the grounds of interference by other nations.⁽¹⁾ One would be surprised to discover how these honorable gentlemen quarreled, for before Mr. Young sat down, he found himself in the midst of a debate with the whole house.

Mr. William Smith finally secured the floor and powerfully defended the abolition movement. At last Mr. Pitt had his chance to speak. He backed up Mr. Smith and refuted Mr. Young's arguments. At half past three in the morning the vote was taken and the abolition of the Slave Trade was voted down.

At the failure of their motion the abolitionists only renewed their activities. Thomas Clarkson was sent to the district around Manchester. Mr. William Smith made a trip to Liverpool and thence to London. Wilberforce made it his business to keep popular and quietly awaited a chance to act.⁽²⁾

On April 2, 1792, the opportunity came and was promptly seized. Mr. Wilberforce, speaking as chairman of the committee, rose to show his honorable opponents that his proposals were purely conciliatory, that he merely wished to discover the connection between such a nefarious trade and the well being of the West Indies.

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXIX, 359.

2. Clarkson, History of Abolition of Slave Trade: II, 134.

All the defenders of the trade had, here-to-fore, only helped to prove the necessity for its abolition. He repeated all his former arguments and pressed the members to come to a speedy decision. He cited the case of San Domingo, as a proof of the necessity for quick action. He warned against legislation that would be likely to remind the negro of his rights, because the black population already far out-numbered the white in the colonies.

Hence, if legislation should state the rights and privileges of the negro, there would be no end of trouble. He wished to merely abolish the trade, and let the negro still be owned. He again urged the necessity of allowing Africa a chance to develop. Already the West India colonies had plenty of negroes. Development of machinery would necessitate fewer slaves; why import any more? He then moved "that it is the opinion of this committee that the trade carried on by British subjects, for the purpose of procuring slaves from Africa, ought to be abolished. This motion, if carried, would be followed by another, viz; That the chairman be directed to move the House for leave to bring in a bill for the abolition of the Slave Trade."⁽¹⁾

Mr. Baillu, agent for Grenada, rose to protest against the motion. He said, "Before the agitation of this question their (the negroes) minds were at rest and they were perfectly contented with their situation. The confidence between them and their masters was so unbounded that, excepting in the stores where sugar, rum etc. were kept, no locks were ever used. Such was the general disposition of the negroes in the British West India islands in 1776. But, I am sorry to say, the case is woefully

1. Parliamentary History of England: 29. 1070.

reversed. At present the West India islands are filled with emissaries and inflammatory publications by the friends of the abolition. Universal distress prevails and there is not an estate without a depot for arms lodged for the purpose of destroying those whose lives every principle of humanity and interest lead us to observe."⁽¹⁾ He cited instances of all the negroes turning Catholics because they loved their masters. He pressed the claim of the colonists for full and ample compensation.

Mr. Dundas, then rose to amend the former question so that the word gradually, instead of immediately, be inserted. When the question was put, it was passed by a majority of one hundred and forty-five votes and the motion that the abolition of the slave trade ought to be gradually accomplished was carried.⁽²⁾

After the House had proceeded to different business, Mr. Wilberforce rose and asked what Mr. Dundas intended to do about the motion. Mr. Dundas, it seemed, intended to do nothing. At that Mr. Fox became quite incensed and asked the meaning of such actions. Did not the large stack of petitions there on the table prove the wishes of the nation? Did Mr. Dundas think that ministers of so great a nation could afford to shilly-shally around about questions of such vast importance? If the honorable gentleman did think so he, Mr. Fox, would take it upon himself to precipitate matters and, therefore, moved that the House resolve itself into a committee to consider the question on the 18th instant. Mr. Wilberforce forcefully seconded this motion and after some further

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXIX, 1075.

2. Parliamentary History of England: XXIX, 1158 and 1175.

discussion it was agreed upon.

Accordingly on April 23, Mr. Dundas rose to bring forward his amendments to the measures proposed for the abolition of the trade. He proposed, first, that after 1800 the trade should be ended; second, that after 1793 no British vessel should carry slaves to foreign nations; third, that after 1792 no ship should be built for the purpose of carrying slaves; fourth, that no slave trader should carry more male than female slaves; fifth, that the female slaves should not be above sixteen in age and the male slaves above twenty; sixth, that the owners be taxed on every negro in their possession; seventh, that commissioners be appointed to look into the estates of the negro owners; eighth, that provisions be made for punishment of cruel treatment of negro slaves; ninth, that a petition be sent to his Majesty asking him to negotiate with foreign powers with a view to the world wide abolition of the slave trade. (1)

On the introduction of these resolutions, the House entered upon a long debate. Mr. Fox and Mr. Wilberforce were strong in their dislike of the date set for the final abolition, and urged the necessity of an earlier date. Lord Sheffield then moved that the words January 1, 1800, be stricken out and the words January 1, 1793 be inserted in their place. A compromise was finally reached fixing the year at 1796. Mr. Dundas, disgusted at the turn that affairs had taken, then calmly rose and begged leave to turn the task of making a new bill over to the honorable amenders.

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXIX, 1792.

On the 1st of May the resolutions were presented to the House and Mr. Pitt moved the 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 8th, and 9th of Mr. Dundas' resolutions. The bill came before the Lords on May 3.

The Duke of Clarence rose to state, that to abolish this slave trade would ruin Great Britain's trade, for he had proofs of foreign countries juntos being in London just waiting for such a chance. Viscount, Stromont moved that the House of Lords make a thorough investigation on its own account into this trade.⁽¹⁾ Being against abolition, this noble lord was merely sparing for time. Lord Grenville rose to object to any delay and said that "for the sake of preserving the national character from disgrace, the slave trade ought to be abolished." Lord Hawkesbury "considered the question of abolition to be of as high importance as any that had ever been agitated in that House..... as to the iniquity and atrocity which had been so largely imputed to the slave trade, he could not imagine why those crimes had not been discovered by our ancestors and were now to be so conspicuous in 1792..... On this ground he could wish at least for the concurrence of the colonial assemblies in a measure which might be fairly deemed internal legislation for the island." The Bishop of St. Davids stated that he had always believed in the bill and would support it most heartedly. The House then voted and the original motion was agreed to by a majority of twenty-six.

This was a great victory for the abolitionists and William Allen wrote, "It gives me great satisfaction to see so many

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXIX, 1354.

of my countrymen warmly pressing the abolition of slavery.⁽¹⁾

However, the friends of the cause did not forget to work and interest kept steadily increasing. Their strongest committee was stationed in Liverpool with the express purpose of getting information at first hand. The slave ships would continue to come in for repairs and many would be the tales told by the sailors, who, on the whole might be said to be radically against the trade. However, the feeling of the sailors failed to worry the owners and they rushed their business as hard as they could, for they felt that their days were numbered.

After a meeting of the Committee for the abolition of slavery, which was held in London in Mr. Wilberforce's rooms, Mr. Wilberforce decided to start the ball rolling again. On February 26, 1793, he rose and moved for the House to resolve itself into a committee to consider the subject of the slave trade. He said that since the bill went through so beautifully the last year, he considered that his motion was already passed. Right there his well laid plans went wrong, for no sooner had he seated himself when Mr. William Young rose to protest. He contended that in the debate of the last year there had been a gross exaggeration of conditions, both inside and outside of the House. He had, that last summer, visited the West Indies and discovered that there were actually as many slave children in the slave cities as there were in cities of the same size in the Northern countries. He believed that there were not in His Majesty's dominions a set of subjects more loyal than the land owners in the West India colonies, but he

1. Life of William Allen: 1, 68.

could not answer for the continuance of loyalty if the men, from whom it was expected, were to be outraged in their character and injured in their property. He then moved that the consideration of the question be postponed until that day six months hence. After some further discussion, the motion was carried as amended by a majority of eight votes.⁽¹⁾

The question came up in April, 1793, only two months after the former debate. This fact proves that, although the enemies of the cause were working hard and furiously to delay proceedings, those proceedings refused to be delayed. The Earl of Abingdon, one who had lately become interested in the question, made a new appeal against abolition. He held that, if investigation should be made, it would be discovered that all these various petitions were from Quakers and other dissenters from the church. He classed dissenters in with the "insidious bloodthirsty French revolutionists." He speaks of Dr. Priestley's sermon to a gathering of people at Liverpool in which he brought out the fact that all men were born free and equal; "in that true spirit of leveling to his leveling flock this prophetic exhortation to perserverance in the good cause, namely: 'that the time is arriving when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb,' meaning that all being equal, black and white, French and English, wolves and lambs shall all 'merry companions everyone' promiscuously pig together; engendering a new race of people a product of this new philosophy."⁽²⁾

The Earl then states that the only legal grounds of every petition

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXX, 513, 517.

2. Parliamentary History of England: 656.

to the King or either House of Parliament "are and can only be for two causes— either against the infringement of a constitutional right by the legislature, or by any branch of it, or, that right being so infringed, for a redress of grievances." "I conceive the constitutional rights of a subject to be the right of personal security, the right of personal liberty and the right of private property." On these grounds he contended that these Quakers had no right to petition constitutionally, and hence their petitions should have no attention paid to them. He then moved to delay further debate until that day five months.

Upon looking at this speech carefully, one can only regret that the Earl of Abingdon had not brought forward those points earlier in the proceedings. It is clear to understand that such arguments appear very legal, and would hence have made a profound impression; but now such a speech showed too clearly the ear marks of a wished for delay. (1)

The Earl of Stanhope was shocked at such a motion. The Duke of Clarence seconded it; but Lord Grenville, Bishop of St. Davids and the Earl of Mansfield, all combined to over rule such delay and the Earl of Abingdon withdrew his motion.

On May 14th, Mr. Wilberforce rose in the House of Commons and moved "That leave be given to bring in a bill for abolishing the Trade carried on for supplying foreign territories with slaves, and that the said motion be referred to a committee of the whole House." Mr. Fox wished to draw the attention of the House to the fact that this was a time of great unrest throughout the

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXX, 658.

country, and that the House had no right to quibble and delay over such a motion. The motion was then voted upon and passed by a majority of seven. A rather close debate ensued which ended in a short postponement of a week.

On the day set, the House resolved itself into a committee of the whole House, as had been before ordered. A motion was made to prohibit the carrying of slaves to foreign territories in British ships. It was agreed to, and a bill was ordered to be brought in to that effect. The bill was negatived on the third reading by a majority of three, the total number of votes being thirty-one to twenty-nine.

This set back to the friends of the cause was of advantage rather than disadvantage for it served to keep them from becoming too sure of themselves. On February 7, 1794, Mr. Wilberforce brought in another bill to abolish the slave trade to foreign countries, and plainly stated that the purpose of the bill was this trade. After some debate, the motion was carried by a majority of sixty-three to forty.⁽¹⁾

The House of Lords became engrossed in debating this subject on May 2 when it was read for the second time. Lord Abingdon, far from feeling hurt about his endeavors of the session proceeding, rose again to protest. He seemed very much impressed with the idea that this outlandish abolition movement was the expression of a French principle and hence, being French, was as poisonous in those days as if it had been German today. He then, as a last resort, repeated that such an act would, instead of being an act of justice, be a great injustice to the colonists. "And shall

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXX, 948.

this House, the dernier resort of justice, sanctify an act of injustice?"⁽¹⁾ How strange it was that a Lord, so outspokenly against the French, would use a French word in a public address! As a matter of fact, Lord Abingdon was a friend of the revolutionists. Ever since his entrance into Parliament he had spoken strongly for freedom. In 1798, he published a rhapsodical eulogy on the revolution under the title of "A Letter to Lady Loughborough from the Earl of Abingdon in Consequence of her Presentation of the Colonies to the Bloomsbury and Inns of Court Association." He voted with the whigs and usually followed Lord Rockingham's lead. Hence, he spoke against the abolition of the trade from a purely political point of view.⁽²⁾

Lord Grenville, in reply to the Earl of Abingdon's speech said that he had been able to make up his mind fully after the exhaustive investigations that had been carried on through the work of the House of Commons, and that he wished to have the trade abolished, "not as an act of humanity or propriety solely, but as an act of positive duty."⁽³⁾ The question was put to a vote and the result was forty-five to four in favor of reading the bill a second time in five months.

True to the order, Mr. Wilberforce rose in the House of Commons on the twelfth of February, 1795, to help along the abolition. He wished to bring before the House the fact that on May 1, 1792, they had moved to abolish the slave trade on the 1st

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1. Parliamentary History of England: XXX, 469.
 2. Dictionary National Biography: II, 450.
 3. Parliamentary History of England: XXXI, 470.

of January, 1796. He sketched briefly the history of the movement so far, and then went on- "The House then named the 1st of January, 1796, as the period of abolition, in order that the planters might, in the interim, supply themselves with such a number of slaves, particularly with females, as might put beyond all doubt the possibility of their keeping up their numbers without importation from Africa..... Who could lay his hand upon his heart and not confess that for the safety of the islands and the happiness of mankind it would have been well if his motion for immediate abolition had passed in the year 1792, in which case there would have been in all the islands above one hundred thousand fewer of those very negroes who are now, most justly, the objects of terror and alarm."⁽¹⁾ He then moved for leave to bring in a bill for the abolition of the slave trade.

Mr. Fox next rose and called attention to the foolishness of so much debating back and forth. The House had decided long ago, and there was absolutely no need for further delay. Mr. Dundas then explained that he had been proceeding on a policy of "watchful waiting," which meant that when it was time to legislate, he would then be in favor of legislating, but not before nor after that time.⁽²⁾ After some further debate, the question was laid over to that day six months.

During this interim, Thomas Clarkson frequently visited Mr. Wilberforce, bringing to him reports of the work of the traders

1. San Domingo became a Negro Republic in 1795, while the other negroes were on the point of rebellion.

2. Parliamentary History of England: XXXI, 132 f.

and merchants.⁽¹⁾

The committee for the abolition of the slave trade continued to shower the country with documents, and petitions kept coming to Parliament.

On February 18, 1796, Mr. Wilberforce made another attempt. He spoke forcefully for immediate action upon the subject and called 'upon every gentleman' to speak now or forever after hold his peace.' Mr. William Young, thereupon, rose to speak. He said that he had just returned from the West Indies; that while visiting those islands, he had taken special notice of the benevolent treatment of the slaves by the planters. He said that the only reason why the House had passed that bill in 1792 was that the friends of the trade had been taken so by surprise as to make it impossible for them to get their evidence ready. The day was certainly inauspicious for Mr. Young, for no sooner had he seated himself than the house was in an uproar. Mr. Pitt finally got the floor and expressed his disgust at such delay. 'Upon the whole, he was so far from feeling any force in the arguments which had been addressed in opposition to the motion that every consideration derived from the critical state of the country furnished so many additional reasons, in his opinion, for adopting the measure proposed.'⁽²⁾

After several other men had been shocked at the statements of the abolitionists and still others surprised over this delaying in dealing with a perfectly obvious necessity, the House gave per-

1. Clarkson, T., History of Abolition of Slave Trade: II, 250.

2. Parliamentary History of England: XXXII, 748.

mission for the introduction of a bill for the abolition of the slave trade.

On March 3, Mr. Wilberforce moved that this bill be read a second time. Mr. William Young, still hopeful to secure delay, moved that the debate be postponed for three months. His objection was overruled and the House allowed the reading. Four days later, Mr. Wilberforce moved 'that this trade be finally abolished the 1st of March, 1797.⁽¹⁾

The friends of the trade made a strong stand against it. A great deal was said by Mr. William Young and by General Smith, which showed clearly who had paid for a dinner or two for them. Thomas Clarkson said, "Evidence against the traders is almost impossible to get, the outlets for information have been closed so effectually by gold and silver."⁽²⁾

Mr. Francis, a friend of abolition, but not directly concerned in any party, then rose to state his conviction that gradual abolition would be better and moved that the time for discussion be put off four months. The question being put, it was decided that the words "this day four months" be substituted for the word "now".

On the specified time, Mr. Francis rose to formulate his ideas into a motion. He wished to regulate the condition of the slaves in the West Indies. After extended debate, it was decided that the condition of the slaves was all that could be desired, and Mr. Francis' motion was lost.

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXXII, 865.

2. Clarkson, T., History of Abolition of Slave Trade: II, 432.

On May 15, 1797, Mr. Wilberforce brought up the question again. Mr. William Young spoke against it. Mr. Ellis seconded him and then Mr. Hobhouse rose to deplore in a very lengthy fashion the fact that the House had wasted nine years debating such a question. He said that if it was not wrong in 1760, it certainly was not wrong now after it had proved such a success financially.

Mr. Pitt rose to protest. 'It was to the encouragement of Parliament that the trade owed its existence; it was by the discouragement of Parliament, then, that it would be discontinued.... as far as the present was a question of policy, he conceived that the future safety of the islands themselves was a sufficient reason to induce gentlemen to vote for abolition.' (1) After him, several men spoke against abolition and when the question was put, it was negatived by a majority of eight.

The Quakers and other dissenters kept working right along. In their yearly meeting, the Quakers always discussed this question, often making it the subject of their service.

In March of 1799, Mr. Wilberforce rose in the House of Commons to bring forward his customary motion. This time the opposition had their forces well marshalled. Mr. Wilberforce was accused of having garbled the facts. He was told that he had paid no attention to the legislation of the colonies, and that, in trying to carry this motion through, he had relied explicitly upon his personal friends. Mr. Canning did his best to help Mr. Wilberforce, but the attempt was unsuccessful. It was lost by a majority

1. Parliamentary History of England: XXXIII, 545.

of thirty.

This final vote showed such a change in the general feeling of the House that Mr. Wilberforce decided it would be wise to wait awhile, so it was not until 1804 that the question came up again.

On May 30 of that year, Mr. Wilberforce rose to start the ball rolling. He said that although the House had seemed very much against the slave trade in 1792, it had let the question slide. He begged that the gentlemen would attend to the incalculable evils that the slave trade produced on the coast of Africa.⁽¹⁾

It was worthy of note that so pernicious had been their connection with the unfortunate Africans, that the general progress of civilization had been reversed, and contrary to former experience, the interior of the country had become the most refined, while those on the coast, who had had the correspondence with them, had become the most profligate, the most ignorant and the most corrupt..... The natives had such an awful desire for gain that, if, at the end of a fight, the King decided that there were not enough captives, he turned around and offered some of the former assailants for sale making every principle yield to that desire of gain which the trade had unfortunately introduced.⁽²⁾ There had been another argument of a still more serious aspect against the trade, which was derived from the idea that the vessels employed in the slave trade were a nursery for the navy and marine service. It gave him much pain to have the appearance of opposing the increase of our

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: II, 420.

2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: II, 428.

naval power. However, he had but lately discovered that the trade, instead of being a benefit, was wearing down and frittering away the strength of our seamen. He went on to prove that the argument that the abolition of the trade would be injurious to British manufacture and diminish the opportunity for the application of our capital was fallacious, because there was only one million out of eleven million employed in the whole trade, and that million could be easily employed some where else. He brought up the fact that, as the general law of Nature seemed to prove the necessity for a general increase of animal life, and as it had been found that men had increased in every country, something was wrong when they thought that the number of slaves in the West Indies fell off instead of increasing. The colonists talked a lot about the encouragement of births among their people, but did they ever practice encouragement? Not until the trade should be abolished. (1)

Mr. Fuller rose to disagree with Mr. Wilberforce. He said that even though the slave trade was not moral, it arose from peculiar circumstances and hence was necessary. Africa had not developed during the whole previous six hundred years, why should one suppose that it would develop now? He did not consider Mr. Wilberforce's points well taken and would oppose such a bill.

Mr. William Smith rose to state his surprise at discovering that the House was still debating when twelve years ago it had decided to abolish said trade, and he could not 'overlook the fact that, although witchcraft was a fruitful source of slavery in

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: II, 459.

Africa, it did not appear that any of those humane merchants or their humane agents ever made any attempt to remove that delusion.' (1)

On June 28, Mr. Wilberforce moved a bill for the abolition of the slave trade. A short debate ensued, and the bill was left over. On July 2, the Duke of Clarence brought in two petitions from the Liverpool merchants against abolishing the slave trade. It took two hours to read the petitions, they were so long and had so many names attached to them. At the end of the two hours, it is safe to say that the honorable members were a little tired of listening to slave trade talk, for the discussion of the petitions as well as the second reading of the bill were left over until that day three months.

Upon the appointed time, therefore, Mr. Wilberforce took the floor. He merely stated the fact that he wished his bill read a third time, and seated himself. General Gascoyne, Sir William Young, and Mr. Fuller were astounded at such an uncalled-for action. Mr. Wilberforce saw that his proposal had too many enemies and too few friends, so he withdrew his motion.

During that week, so many petitions were received and such agitation was felt throughout the country, that at the meeting of the committee for the abolition of the slave trade, Mr. Wilberforce was strongly urged to push things tooth and nail in Parliament so that finally their aim might be accomplished. (2)

On February 28, 1805, Mr. Wilberforce moved the second reading of his bill. General Gascoyne wanted the House to consider

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: II, 46.

2. Clarkson, T. History of Abolition of Slave Trade, II, 313.

the widows and orphans and not abolish a trade into which all their money had gone. One can easily see that the opponents of the bill were merely fillibustering. The arguments that they brought up were so thin that they would not hold water, figuratively speaking.

Mr. Fox realized that fact in his speech following General Gascoyne. He said that men, who had listened to Mr. Wilberforce and had held that his arguments were fallacious, were merely troubled with this fear of good eloquence. "The Jacobins of France had also been much afraid of it; it was one of their maxims, that there was no sort of Aristocracy so dangerous as the Aristocracy of talents." The honorable gentlemen appeared to have imbibed the maxim, but he would hardly convince the house that the better they heard a measure supported, the more suspiciously they should receive it. Mr. Wilberforce then called the attention of the House to the fact that every argument that had been presented against the bill had been given in the interests of self and for the gaining of money. It seemed perfectly obvious to him that such arguments did not deserve to be allowed. After further debate, the bill was lost by a majority of seven.⁽¹⁾

The Attorney General was then brought into service, and the friends of the cause began on a new tack. On March 31, 1806, he rose and moved for leave to bring in a bill to "carry into effect his Majesty's proclamation of the 18th of August, 1804, for preventing the importation of African negroes by British subjects to British colonies conquered by or ceded to us in the course of the war."⁽²⁾

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: III, 657.
 2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: VI, 597.

The leave was given and the bill was read a second time on April 24 and read a third time and passed May 2.

The bill came up in the House of Lords May 7. Lord Grenville upheld it, but the Duke of Clarence and Lord Hawkesbury opposed it strongly. It came up again May 16 and after a good lively debate, was passed by a majority of twenty-five.

Now that the slave trade was restricted, it only remained for Wilberforce and his friends to get it abolished altogether. On June 10, Mr. Fox rose to move that the House take speedy methods to abolish the slave trade. He said that Mr. Wilberforce had worked hard for the last sixteen years and had alone brought in motion after motion for abolition. Now, he considered it wise to let some new man take up the work. Mr. Wilberforce was greatly moved and thanked Mr. Fox for his kind words. However, he wished to add a little to the proceedings by moving that a humble address be presented His Majesty, beseeching him to take such measures as in his wisdom he should judge proper "for establishing by negotiation with foreign powers a concert and agreement for abolishing the African slave trade, and for affording assistance mutually towards carrying into execution any regulations which may be adopted by any or all of the contracting parties for accomplishing their common purpose, assuring His Majesty that this House, feeling the justice and honour of the British nation to be deeply and peculiarly involved in the great object they have in view, will be ready at all times cheerfully to concur in giving effect to such measures as His Majesty might see fit to adopt for its attainment." (1)

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: VII, 603.

On July 15, a slave ship restriction bill was brought forward evidently from some source outside the two parties. It presumably came from the opponents of abolition; for why should the abolitionists, after having agreed to try to enforce the King's proclamation to abolish slavery, entirely try to placate themselves by restricting the shipping of merchandise already prohibited? Finally it was agreed to pass the bill, which allowed no owner of vessels destined to carry slaves to take out licenses after May, 1807.

On January 2, 1807, Lord Grenville in the House of Lords brought in a bill for abolishing the slave trade. He stated that he fully realized the importance of such a question, and hence would move for its second reading in a fortnight's time. Lord Hawkesbury then called for the result of the petition that was sent to the King during the last session, so that the House could learn the intentions of the foreign powers regarding that fact. On February 2, a motion was carried to the effect that there should be representatives present from the colonies. Two days later the merchants of Liverpool requested a regular trial as their last hope. Lord Grenville disagreed with the advisability of such an allowance and said: "This is not the first time nor the first year that the inquiry has been made before your Lordship. It is the twentieth year..... This bill is not offered your Lordships because the capital of no British subjects is involved in the slave trade, or because no British mariners are engaged in it, but expressly because the property and persons are engaged in it, and hence it calls upon the justice and humanity of their Lordships to prevent this misapplication both of the one and of the other."⁽¹⁾

1. Hansards Parliamentary Debates: VIII, 614.

The second reading of the bill was passed on February 5 after Lord Grenville had taken up the points for and against in great detail, just as Mr. Wilberforce had done before him in the Commons. The next day he proposed making the final abolition to date from January 1, 1808, and that no British ship destined to carry slaves should clear British ports after May 1, 1807. The question was put and carried in the affirmative, and the report was required on Monday. On February 9, Lord Grenville said that the date for final abolition had been set for May 1, 1807, in order to have the same date throughout.

On February 10, a message was sent from the House of Lords to the House of Commons, stating that the House of Lords had passed a bill for the abolition of the Slave trade, and wished the Commons to take immediate action.⁽¹⁾

The bill was then read once. A debate ensued which resulted in leaving the question for a few days.

Feeling ran high at this time. The committee for the abolition of the slave trade met every night and showed much excitement at some of its meetings. Lord Grenville and Wilberforce were both there, and both of them received advice of all sorts from all sorts of people.⁽²⁾

On March 16, 1807, the House of Commons held its final debate on the subject. They discussed the bill that the Lords had sent down, discovered no seeming infringement of their rights, and passed it. The King gave his formal consent and the slave

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: VIII, 718.

2. Clarkson, T., History of Abolition of Slave Trade, II, 321.

was no more.⁽¹⁾

III.

It now remained for the friends of the abolition of the slave trade to turn their attention to slavery itself.

The very next day in the House of Commons, the Earl of Percy asked for leave to bring in a bill for the gradual abolition of slavery. He cited several of the arguments given in favor of abolishing the trade which bore directly on the need to end the whole institution. He then finished by saying- "If the House meant to say that by abolishing the slave trade they had done all that duty demanded, and that they would leave the emancipation of the slaves to the hazard of fortuitous circumstances, let them be explicit and say so; but if there lurked in any man's mind a secret desire to proceed in that business, a secret conviction that more ought to be done, than had been done, it was unmanly, it was dishonorable not to speak out. For one, he would boldly declare that he had further views."⁽²⁾

Mr. Wilberforce was a little surprised that anything should have been said so soon. He believed that, if you win a victory over your enemies, you should let them sit back and get their breath before the fight begins again. He put himself on record, however, as one whose dearest wish was to see all slaves

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: VIII, 825.

2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: IX, 144.

free.

After this good beginning, the work of the House became merely to read the almost hourly petitions that poured in. Nearly every religious sect and many rural communities, considered it their duty to petition Parliament for the emancipation of the slaves.

The enemies of the cause were not inactive either, for soon came reports of smugglings and evadings of the law. A notice was sent up from Sierra Leone and Indian Islands by Captain Owen and Judge Thorpe to the effect that men were carrying on the trade just as usual. Judge Thorpe reported that the trade was carried on from Macasar and Borneo to Java and Sumata.⁽¹⁾

As a result of this news Parliament began to protest, and the result was the passing of a resolution on the 15th of June, 1810, stating: "That this House has learned with great surprise and indignation, the attempts that have recently been made to evade the prohibitions of the Act abolishing the African slave trade, and this House will early in the next session of Parliament take into consideration such measures as may tend effectually to present such daring violations of the law."⁽²⁾

The country was on the point of demanding complete emancipation but, as yet, Mr. Wilberforce was not sure enough. Having had such a hard fight for the abolition of the slave trade, he did not wish to precipitate another period of sixteen long years

1. Life of William Allen: I, 125.

2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XIX, 234.

of debate. Indeed, if one follows the proceedings of Parliament at this time, one will realize that other questions held the center of the stage. Some of these questions were of first importance. There was the reformation of Parliament itself; the reconstruction after the war which had been so disastrous; the raising or lowering of the tariff. Therefore, as the Duke of Wellington said, "The great pull has been made by abolishing the trade. It is now only a matter of time before all the slaves will go."⁽¹⁾

On March 12, 1810, it was moved that copies of the correspondence between nations upon the subject of the abolition of the slave trade be made and brought to the House. It was said that America had abolished the trade, but that a great deal of illicit transportation was being done under the flag of Sweden, and that the Americans wished to negotiate upon this subject. Mr. Wilberforce rose to second the motion. He called the attention of the House to the fact that America had abolished the trade first and that, already in that country, there were several states where the slaves had been emancipated. No objecting voice was heard and the motion was carried.⁽²⁾

The correspondence was brought in. Sweden was asked to co-operate and agreed to do so. But the trade still flourished, necessitating a new motion in 1811. This motion asked the House for permission to bring in a bill for the "more effectual abolition of the trade."

On December 6, 1813, we find Lord Holland, who has become

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1. Life of William Allen: I, 134. (Meeting of Friends for the abolition of Slave Trade).
 2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XVI, 11.

tired of delay, telling the House to hurry up and get ahead of the public. Petition after petition had been received, each one of which had been laid on the table. The country was keeping up its interest and working on the policy that insistent reminders brought the best results.

On May 2, 1814, Mr. Wilberforce rose to state that 'unless we interpose with effect to procure a general abolition, the practical result of the restoration of peace will be to revive a trade which we have prohibited as a crime.'⁽¹⁾

Two days later, in the House of Lords, Lord Grenville moved that a petition be sent to the King, asking that, in the negotiations for peace, he would do his best to come to an agreement with foreign nations regarding the slave trade. The motion was voted upon and passed.⁽²⁾

The condition of the slaves who were being smuggled into the colonies was so much worse than it had been that the English people were shocked. Mr. Wilberforce was growing old. In 1821, he appealed to Thomas Folwell Baxton to undertake the piloting of this new question through Parliament.⁽³⁾ Two years later a society for the gradual abolition of slavery in the colonies of Great Britain was formed, the principal members of which were— Wilberforce, Baxton, Zachary Macaulay, Dr. Lushington and Lord Suffield.⁽⁴⁾

This society formulated a working plan consisting of gradual abolition by establishing a kind of serfdom for existing

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1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XXIV, 121.
 2. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XX, 112.
 3. Life of William Allen: II, 106.
 4. Ingram, History of Slavery: 176.

slaves, and passing a law emancipating all that were then children after a certain date. This plan Mr. Buxton brought up in Parliament in May of that same year. The plan did not appeal to the House and was voted down.

During a short interim which followed the failure of Mr. Buxton's plan, the petitions came in thick and fast. The members of Parliament became rather disgusted at the large number of these papers, and all that were presented were ordered to lie on the table. It is human nature to tend towards doing the opposite of that which other people remind you that you should do. These petitions bothered the House, and being an assembly of the foremost men of the kingdom, the members considered themselves capable of taking up measures as they appeared necessary. As a result, the House delayed and delayed, ostensibly awaiting action by the other great powers.

In the summer of 1822, William Allen was sent on a mission to Metternich and to the Tsar of Russia. His object was to gain joint action by the Powers. He intended that the slave trade should be considered an act of piracy, and that all nations should agree to this step. In telling of his interview with the Tsar of Russia he says—" I earnestly entreated him to endeavor to carry this point in the Congress, and if this should be found impossible, that he would then set the example himself and use his influence with the other Potentates; also, to do it separately, that the guilt and odium might rest upon those nations that refused to concur in the measure."⁽¹⁾

1. Allen, Life of Allen: II, 67.

The results of this mission may be seen in the fact that in May, 1823, William Allen writes, "All the Powers but France have pledged themselves to act in unison regarding the slave trade at a meeting of the plenipotentiaries to be held in London in a few weeks."⁽¹⁾

Just a year later, the House of Commons, driven to desperation by all the petitions, resolved— "That it is expedient to adopt effectual and decisive measures for ameliorating the conditions of the slave population in his Majesty's colonies. That through a determined and persevering, but at the same time judicious and temperate enforcement of such measures, this House looks forward to a progressive improvement in the character of the slave population such as may prepare them for a participation in those civil rights and privileges which are enjoyed by other classes of His Majesty's subjects. That this House is anxious for the accomplishment of this purpose, at the earliest period that shall be compatible with the wellbeing of the slaves themselves, with the safety of the colonies, and with a fair and equitable consideration of the interests of private property."⁽²⁾ This resolution came up in the House of Lords in 1826 and after a short debate was agreed to.

This movement on the part of the government was received with ill grace by the planters. They were disgusted that their friends had allowed Parliament to go even that far and took

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XIV, 1140.

2. Ingram, History of Slavery: 177.

immediate steps to conceal the action from the slaves. The attempt at concealment was useless, for the negroes discovered the fact and jumped at the conclusion that they had become free and refused to work. Martial law was proclaimed and the rising was put down with great severity, all of which gave cause for a strong feeling in England against the planters. In 1830, the feeling became strong enough to warrant Mr. Buxton's trying again. He, therefore, proposed on November 8, that arrangements be immediately made to bring up the question of the abolition of slavery. The motion was debated and then postponed. Meanwhile petitions kept pouring into both Houses. On February 10 of the following year, the Duke of Buckingham said, "I heartily wish that the House would do something and not leave this important movement in the hands of interested persons."⁽¹⁾ The House did nothing except allow the admission of petitions until May 24, when Mr. Buxton again introduced a motion to appoint a committee to consider measures for the purpose of effecting the extinction of slavery. The House appeared to be just about wholly in favor of the motion and it was passed after a short debate.

The Lords received the motion upon the same day. Lord Harwood said that he was against any hasty and indiscreet emancipation, for he knew it would be a source of great evils. The Earl of Suffield then called the House's attention to the petition from the inhabitants of London which had just been presented. He said it would cover half a mile on their Lordship's tables. He had

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Ser. 3, II, 348.

twenty-one other petitions, some of them signed by six thousand persons, and the places from which they came were for the most part of great consideration and importance. Lord Ellenborough rose to state that he did not 'think that this, or any government required the spur of petitions to do that which was dictated by common humanity.'⁽¹⁾ In the end, the petitions were ordered to lie on the table, but the motion to appoint a committee was agreed to.

A good expression of the general feeling of the times is found in A Letter to John Bull by a Free born Englishman. In this letter we learn of 'upwards of eight hundred thousand subjects of Great Britain of that freedom giving land, that are daily suffering, or liable to suffer, at the will of despotic masters. All these, and ten times more appalling miseries.' The letter ended with an answer to an article in the London Times of May 25, 1823, which had spoken carelessly of the sufferings of the slaves, and sarcastically compared them with animals and insects. "This affected whine about the sufferings of turtle, horses, dogs, fish, worms, snails, insects, and animalcula is no vindication of the cruel injustice inflicted on their fellow creatures by human beings professing to be Christians. What wouldst thou, John, have said to anyone who had thus attempted to turn thy slight sufferings in Newgate into ridicule? John! John! be a man; be an upright and a merciful man; be a Christian! And then thou wouldst invariably do unto others as thou wouldst have them do to thee."⁽²⁾

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: XIII, 15.

2. Free Born Englishman, A Letter to John Bull: 30.

It was not until 1833 when Earl Gray was prime minister, that the committee appointed two years before, reported the result of its work. It brought forward a ministerial plan for the abolition of slavery. This was read for the third time in the House of Commons on August 7, passed the Lords on the 20th, and secured the royal assent on the 28th.⁽¹⁾ A sum of twenty million pounds sterling was voted as compensation to the planters. A system of apprenticeship for seven years was established in order to lead up gradually to the actual emancipation. The slaves were bound to work for their masters during this period for three-fourths of the day, and might be heavily punished if they did not comply with the required amount of labor. During this time, the master was to supply them with food and clothing. All children under six years of age were to be free immediately, and provision was to be made for their religious and moral instruction. This system of seven years apprenticeship did not meet with much approval. In Antigua, the slaves were set free at once and that Christmas was the first one in twenty years that did not need martial law proclaimed to preserve the peace.

The friends of the cause immediately proceeded to urge Mr. Buxton to get a resolution against this transitional system through Parliament as soon as he could. The Duke of Wellington, however, at a meeting of the African Institution, stated that well enough had better be let alone.⁽²⁾

1. Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Series 3; VII, 1124.

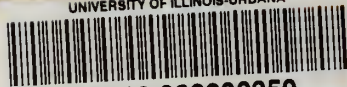
2. Allen, William, Life of William Allen: II, 326.

However, in 1834, a resolution was passed against the system and the local governments, discovering that the negroes would no longer work, cut off two years of their apprenticeship, and gave them freedom in 1838 instead of 1840.

The night before their freedom was to be given them, the slaves in the colonies were highly excited. They gathered on the highest hills to watch the sun rise, and when the golden ball did appear above the horizon, they, with a great shout, proclaimed their freedom. The work of Wilberforce, Buxton, Grenville, Allen Wellington and others was over. The slaves had been freed. The work of the slaves had just begun. No longer could they blame their masters for everything. Now they had only themselves to blame, and it remained with them whether they lived or died. They rejoiced at their freedom as children will. They began to work as children will. Sometimes they got discouraged, and as yet they have not attained absolute equality with the white people, but when their state of today is compared to that of a hundred years ago, one finds real advancement.

The negroes have justified their existence. They have repaid the work of the Parliamentarians. Now it remains for them to work up so that they will be able, some day, to lessen their debt of gratitude to the English people.

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